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Genealogy Gems: Academic Assets

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GENEALOGY GEMS: ACADEMIC ASSETS

BY NANCY RICHEY

IMAGES LIBRARIAN, KENTUCKY LIBRARY, WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Most academic libraries have extensive monograph and bibliography collections, indexes, periodical abstracting services, and directories. Combining these resources with training in locating, evaluating, and using such information gives academic librarians a jumpstart on helping patrons interested in genealogy. Listed below are some of the most useful academic library resources for genealogy researchers.

INDEXES AND DATABASES

The *Biography and Genealogy Master Index* covers about 15 million biographical entries in roughly 5000 volumes of reference material. It contains information on both contemporary and historical figures, including birth and death dates, and gives the title/edition in which relevant entries can be found. It also acts as an index to other indexes. This resource is particularly helpful if one's ancestor was noted.

Newsbank's *America's Obituaries and Death Notices* is a subscription index that compiles newspaper obituaries from around the United States. A list of the papers indexed is available. With full-text searchable obituaries, this tool is invaluable for locating the full name, place of residence, names of family members, and funeral/burial details about a deceased person. Some obituaries include information about occupation and activities.

The *American Civil War Research Database* allows researchers to find individual soldiers as well as regiment and battle information. The database indexes 222 volumes of rosters (published by the state Adjutants General), regimental histories, and the following official records: pension index, 1860 census, Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), Roll of Honor, and Medal of Honor. There are 4 million soldiers listed here, with over 15,000 photographs.

WorldCat, which opened the "world" of library holdings to researchers, is an online catalog of books and web resources in participating libraries. Each entry shows the location(s) of the item; of special interest to the genealogist are manuscripts, newspaper and journal articles, book chapters, unpublished papers, and videotapes/DVDs. Some entries are for rare published and cataloged genealogical family histories, plus unpublished family files.

ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

The *Historical New York Times (1851-2001)* has full-page article images with searchable full-text for all issues. Coverage is not limited to the New York area; e.g., this out-of-state news item, from 1886: "Capt. John Alcock, an old turfman, died at his home near Glasgow, KY, aged 75. Captain Alcock was a noted trainer in his day, and has trained for and run more four-mile races than any man in the country." Many of these articles provide the only death record available, as state death certificates for Kentucky were not mandatory until 1911.

The *Historical Los Angeles Times (1881-1986)* can provide genealogical patrons with information about their westward-migrating ancestors. Of particular interest is the Annual Trade Number Edition (published 1886-1962), which promoted Southern California as a heaven on earth. This paper also covered news from Kentucky; e.g., "Fatal Mill Explosion in Kentucky" (May 27, 1883) reads, "Boyles' Mill of Waterford, Spencer County, Kentucky exploded yesterday, fatally wounded several workmen, and instantly killed John Purcell, the owner of the mill."

The *[London] Times Digital Archives (1785-1985)* with full-text searching offers researchers "every complete page, including

headline, article, editorial, announcement, image and advertisements.” The obituaries and birth/death/marriage notices are very helpful for international connections.

MICROFILM AND PRINT LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

These papers are a gold mine for genealogists. In addition to detailed stories about local events and families, they often contain “gossip” news; e.g., this nugget from a December 1876 issue of *The Courier Journal*: “Fayette Arnold, a shoemaker at Woodburn, Warren County, KY, went to bed with too much whisky and woke up dead Wednesday morning.”

HISTORICAL MAPS AND ATLASES

Historical maps show the boundaries and places of a geographical area as it used to be rather than as it is now. Some areas of the world, especially central Europe, have changed political affiliation multiple times in the past two hundred years; e.g., the area now called Croatia was once part of a larger political unit called Yugoslavia, and before that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Also, the boundaries of the original American colonies have changed dramatically; a document might list a place in “Virginia” that is now part of Kentucky.

Some of the most helpful historical maps and atlases: *A Genealogical and Historical Atlas of the United States of America* (Everton Publishers, 1976), *Atlas of American History* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), *Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries 1788-1980* (GK Hall, 1984), *Historical U.S. County Outline Map Collection 1840-1980* (Dept. of Geography, Univ. of Maryland – Baltimore, 1984), *Township Atlas of the United States* (Androit Assoc., 1979), and *A Series of County Outline Maps of Southeastern United States of the Period 1790-1980* (Dept. of Geography, Univ. of North Carolina, 1973).

CITY AND TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES

City and telephone directories (not the same thing) are an excellent, though underused, resource for genealogists. Telephone directories have traditionally listed only name, address, and phone numbers, but are useful for distinguishing between persons with the same names or initials, as well as for establishing residence.

City directories, on the other hand, date from the time before phones were common household features. They usually listed the primary person in each residence, and noted that person's occupation, so that by following a relative's entry from year to year, the researcher can track not only residence, but career changes as well. These city directories also list asylums, cemeteries, fraternal organizations, newspapers, railroads and schools in an area, which can give researchers new avenues to explore for family details. Many directories contain addenda with information “too late for insertion,” and some even list deaths during an epidemic year. City directories were often compiled through door-to-door surveys, just like the census, and so had the benefit of verified information from someone in the household.

UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Most university archives collect official publications such as yearbooks, schedules, handbooks, catalogs, the school newspaper, and directories, but in the archives you will also find personnel files, campus maps, photographs, speeches, and biographical data for students and staff. There may also be personal papers of individuals connected with the university; these collections might include manuscripts, photographs, slides, video and audio cassettes. Personal scrapbooks are often donated to archives; these are particularly helpful to genealogists.

FEDERAL DEPOSITORY MATERIALS

Federal Depository libraries house U.S. government publications. These publications often include journals, private land claims, veterans' burial lists, individual petitions to Congress, and other such resources useful in genealogical research. The documents are in print, microfiche, microfilm, and electronic form.

The genealogist, like any other library patron, has gone beyond using the traditional tools of research. All librarians must be prepared to handle a variety of in-person and electronic requests from this growing population. This outreach, in a time of “libraries, now more than ever,” will aid in keeping libraries viable, needed, utilized, and growing.

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ADDITIONAL READING:

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*. Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 2001.

Simpson, Jack. *Basics of Genealogy Reference: A Librarian's Guide*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2008.

Swan, James. *The Librarian's Guide to Genealogical Services and Research*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2004.

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- ¹ "An Old Turfman Dead." *New York Times* (1857-1922) 23 Dec. 1886, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. *New York Times* (1851-2007), ProQuest. Web. 1 Dec. 2010.
- ² "Fatal Mill Explosion in Kentucky." *Los Angeles Times* (1881-1886) 27 May 1883, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. *Los Angeles Times* (1881-1987), ProQuest. Web. 1 Dec. 2010.
- ³ <http://gdc.gale.com/products/the-times-digital-archive-1785-1985>. Web. 17 Oct. 2010.
- ⁴ *Courier Journal*. 11 Dec. 1876. Front page. Print.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As noted in the first Genealogy Gems column (*Kentucky Libraries* 74.4), this space is devoted to the subject of genealogy, and we welcome submissions on any related topic. Please see that first column for a list of specialized topics which we plan to cover. No column in this series is meant to be a comprehensive look at the specific subject discussed. Submitted manuscripts will be edited by the *Kentucky Libraries* editorial board.

Please direct questions or submissions Katherine Pennavaria, column editor, at k.pennavaria@wku.edu